

For Military Media

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103rd Civil Support Team aces proficiency evaluation

By Sgt. Edward Eagerton

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska— Members of the 103rd Civil Support Team, Weapons of Mass Destruction, Alaska National Guard, along with Guardsmen from Idaho, Mont., Utah and Wash., took part in a training proficiency evaluation exercise here, Feb 17-20, and passed with flying colors.

The exercise was designed to evaluate and grade the 103rd CST WMD for their ability to respond to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. Four months before the exercise, the 103rd CST WMD was rated as being trained in less than 20 percent of their skillsets.

"We assessed ourselves as being trained in only two of 12 areas last October just because of the amount of personnel turnover we had," said Lt. Col. Wayne Don, commander of the 103rd CST WMD. "So we had a very aggressive train up period to get us to overcome some of the personnel challenges and some of the experience gaps we had throughout the teams."

The exercise took place in a fictional city named Baumeister, located at the Baumeister Military Operations on Urban Terrain site, which is a mock-up of a small town for service members to train for urban operation scenarios. There, various clandestine labs were constructed to set the stage for the 103rd CST WMD to respond to.

Inside the labs, real but safe levels of hazardous materials were put in place, just enough to trigger the alarms on the unit's detection devices.

"One of the challenges we had was the weather," said Staff Sgt. Michael Buck, survey member with the 103rd CST WMD. "We had a lot of snow dump on us the first night, and then going back the second day, we had to deal with a lot of the snow while going into the laboratories, moving our equipment around in confined spaces, and moving around in level-A suits."

Suited up in their protective suits, teams from the 103rd CST WMD moved into the snow-covered city after they were given the green light from a notional security element. With each team, a grader followed along, noting the steps of their performance.

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"The challenge is the response to the evaluation," said Don. "There are time standards that we have to meet. We have an alert procedure that requires us to have 100 percent accountability of all of our personnel once we've been notified within an hour. At 90 minutes, our advanced element has to respond and be leaving once we've been given the notification, and then our main body has to respond and be leaving within three hours."

During the fictional scenario, one Guardsman was exposed to a hazardous agent and fell ill. According to procedures, his fellow unit members evacuated him from the site to receive medical attention and to assess what had caused the reaction.

After a 90-minute wait period had passed, the Guardsmen grabbed their equipment and moved back into the city. There, they went from building to building and located the labs, collected evidence, and brought the samples back to their mobile lab.

"We performed a site characterization of the laboratories with a request that we perform sampling missions to gather any of those materials so that scientific agencies can analyze them and determine what we're dealing with," Buck explained.

After the exercise finished, the team gathered in a room and conducted an after-action-review of their evaluation. There, the graders reviewed with the teams their performance and whether or not they rated as being trained and ready to perform their real-world missions.

"Our team did great," said Buck. "We were able to go in with the mission goals and achieve that goal according to our processes, checklists and guidelines and meet the needs of the incident commander. As a citizen soldier in the Alaska National Guard, we do provide that capability to the protection for or the identification of clandestine labs so that the population can be safe if the need should ever arise."

The training between the two evaluations paid off. The graders rated the unit with a 100-percent pass rate in all of their functional areas, a vast improvement over the previous evaluation four months before.

"It was a pretty significant achievement to get certified as trained in 12 of 12 functional areas after the amount of turnover we had and with experience issues," said Don. "What this means for us is that we're certified to respond within the state and also participate in the national response cycle in the country. For us, more than anything else, it gives us a baseline to determine what we need to do to maintain our training proficiency throughout the year."

This evaluation, according to Don, certifies the unit to respond to state and national level incidents until their next recertification in 18 months.

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Photo Cutlines:

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Alaska National Guardsmen from the 103rd Civil Support Team, Weapons of Mass Destruction, as well as Guardsmen from Idaho, Wash., Mont. and Utah, took part in a field training exercise on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Feb. 18-20. The exercise was conducted to evaluate the 103rd CST WMD for their ability to respond to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. The unit received perfect scores in all 12 categories of their evaluation, ensuring that the Guardsmen stand ready to deploy in the event of any CBRN threat posed to the nation. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Edward Eagerton